

# MEETING REPORT

## REGION II PUBLIC MEETING STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES, SOLUTIONS, AND VISION

**Location:** Wendler Junior High School

**Date:** October 20, 2001

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### **OPENING REMARKS:**

Regional Supervisor Bob Clark welcomed the participants and introduced the topic of this meeting. Kelly Hepler, Director of the Division of Sport Fish (DSF), opened the meeting pointing out his twin purposes for the strategic planning effort: increasing the effectiveness and accountability of the Division in preserving, protecting, and enhancing sport fishing in Alaska. Director Hepler stressed his desire that this strategic planning support the economic and social importance of sport fishing in the state. He also noted that the strategic planning process will be conducted cooperatively with the public and focus everyone on the state's management activities and recreational fishing opportunities. He indicated that the planning process will include many opportunities for public input over the coming months. He introduced DSF staff members present.

### **MEETING PRODUCTS AND APPROACH:**

Walt Gasson of Dynamic Solutions Group identified there were three kinds of information needed from the public at this juncture: (1) identification of the major issues and opportunities facing sport fishing right now and in the future; (2) a listing of potential strategies to respond to these issues and opportunities, and (3) articulation of the preferred future, or vision, Alaskans hold for sport fishing. The information sought at these meetings was of a qualitative nature and meant to be an exploratory, first discussion with the public. Refinement of the discussion will occur as the strategic planning process continues.

### ***ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONCERNING SPORT FISHING IN ALASKA***

Participants were asked to identify the most important sport fishing issues facing Alaska in the next ten years. They then identified those issues over which DSF and the Board of Fisheries had some direct influence. Those issues are summarized (not in any order of priority) below:

- Developing a sustainable resident species plan
- Involvement with native groups
- Quantities and quotas
- Charter limits

- Access
- Sustainability
- Disappearance of large (50+ pounds) Kenai king salmon
- Involvement of all user groups
- Clarification of regulations
- Habitat enhancement
- Lack of local low-cost opportunity for youth
- Horsepower limitation on the Kenai River
- Enforcement
- Research vs. opinion
- New funding
- Quality of the fishing experience
- Educating the public

## ***POTENTIAL STRATEGIES***

When asked to suggest strategies to deal with these issues and opportunities, the participants identified (not in order of priority) the following:

**Developing a sustainable resident species plan:** DSF and the Board of Fisheries should move forward with the process now underway to develop this plan, and include a broad range of other interests. It should be based on “clean” stocks of wild fish.

**Involvement with native groups:** DSF should expand their involvement with native groups in Alaska. Potential strategies include public involvement, education, enforcement (through subcontracting arrangements with native corporations) and training/technical assistance to native communities.

**Quantities and quotas:** Limits should be placed on nonresident anglers, commercial users and guides. The following order of priority for fisheries should be considered:

1. Subsistence
2. Sport
3. Commercial

**Charter limits:** Regulations for charter boat anglers should be developed that set realistic limits on the number of fish harvested. The issue of party fishing must be confronted in the development of these limits. Limitations on the number of non-resident charter licenses should be considered. Guide licenses are also an important issue in the development of these regulations.

**Access:** Additional access is needed in many areas. Physical, legal and regulatory issues must be considered. Federal funds may be available for development of access for physically challenged anglers. Incentives for landowners to provide access for anglers should be considered, and access easements should be purchased. Access must be balanced with other concerns, including the quality of the angler experience.

**Sustainability:** The issue of sustainability should be a primary concern in fisheries management and planning. DSF should consider long-term impacts and error on the side of conservation. Additional research may be needed.

**Disappearance of large (50+ pounds) Kenai king salmon:** This regional issue is important far beyond Region II. Additional data is needed to determine why this is occurring. Changes in regulations, including both sport and commercial fisheries, may be needed.

**Involvement of all user groups:** More people in Alaska need to be involved in sport fisheries issues. Stronger stakeholder involvement would provide a stronger position for state management in state-federal conflicts over fisheries. More information needs to be available to stakeholders. Using other sources of funding to involve stakeholders is suggested.

**Clarification of regulations:** Regulations should be written at an eighth grade reading level. Boundary zones should be standardized where possible. Outside review (e.g., like textbook review by education board) should be considered. Good conservation should not be sacrificed for the sake of simplicity in regulations.

**Habitat enhancement:** Tax incentives should be available to landowners who conserve habitat. Tax penalties should be levied on landowners who develop areas on Alaska fisheries. Permitting of development and zoning in riparian areas should be more stringent. Boroughs should not receive fish tax money if they do not restrict development. Landowner incentives for habitat improvement should be developed.

**Lack of local low-cost opportunity for youth:** Special areas should be available for kids only. These could be supported by enhanced stocking of fish in areas near population centers. Fish fairs and other events to educate parents and kids about fishing should be implemented.

**Horsepower limitation on the Kenai River:** This regional issue affects the quality of the angling experience in an area important far outside the region boundaries. It is related to a serious habitat problem that must be solved. A number of regulation changes should be considered, including wake size limits, increasing the number of “drift only” days, limiting the number of people in boats, limiting the size of boats, etc.

**Enforcement:** More enforcement is needed. This is an issue of funding, but a number of strategies could make enforcement efforts more effective, including: a stream watch program, more stringent penalties, publicizing arrests, penalizing the guide and client collectively and additional signing could help. Models for more effective enforcement, especially in rural areas, are available.

**Research vs. opinion:** This is also an issue of insufficient funding. Research needs must be prioritized, focusing research on anticipated future issues. The political climate should be separated from DSF research needs. Economic impacts should be considered. DSF should develop legislative advocates.

**New funding:** The development of new funding sources for DSF will require creative thinking. A number of potential funding sources were noted, including: federal highway funds for roadside access, a check-off, tax revenues from development, shifting money from fish landing taxes, Teaming with Wildlife, contests, permit auctions, auctioning of confiscated equipment and stamp art sales.

**Quality of the fishing experience:** This important issue is complex, and involves the process of gaining considerable stakeholder input. A variety of strategies were noted, including: legislation to set aside wild rainbow trout streams, dealing with “combat fishing”, developing trophy fisheries, limiting the number of anglers on some streams, allocating fishing opportunity (considering guided vs. non-guided or resident vs. non-resident) and prohibition of guides on some rivers.

**Educating the public:** DSF should develop a higher profile in providing information and education to the public. A number of strategies were suggested, including: more information in newspapers, wider distribution of DSF videos, improved signing, incorporating DSF issues into weekly fishing reports, emphasizing respect for other users (subsistence, commercial, etc.), development of outreach tools like coloring books and comic books to educate young people and their families. DSF should elevate sport fishing issues to that of terrestrial wildlife in Alaska.

## ***PREFERRED FUTURE (VISION) FOR SPORT FISHING IN ALASKA***

Meeting participants were asked to answer the question:

**“What should sport fisheries in Alaska look like in ten years?”**

Responses from participants included the following common themes:

- Improved access to fishing opportunity, with less crowding;
- Abundant, sustainable fish populations, managed with sound biology;
- Well-informed stakeholders, educated on fisheries issues and working in harmony in decision making processes;
- Simplified regulations, effectively enforced;
- Diverse, quality fishing experiences that emphasize angling experience over harvest and subsistence and sport uses over commercial uses;
- Healthy fish habitat;
- Ample funding for sport fisheries, from diverse sources; and
- A legacy of involvement passed on from generation to generation within families, as active participants in sport fishing.

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